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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Thursday Israeli officials in

Washington urged "crisper" and "faster" moves to sanction Iran after a UN report found that the Islamic Republic had expanded its [programs to obtain nuclear weapons. The officials welcomed the Bush administration's stated interest in pressing for expanded sanctions, but expressed mounting concern over the slow pace of international action.

In its lead story, Ha'aretz reported that the US has demanded that Israel desist from even exploratory contacts with Syria, of the sort that would test whether Damascus is serious in its declared intentions to hold peace talks with Israel. Ha'aretz said that, in meetings with Israeli officials recently, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was forceful in expressing Washington's view on the matter. The American argument is that even "exploratory talks" would be considered a prize in Damascus. Ha'aretz quoted senior Israeli officials as saying that the American position vis-a-vis Syria, as it was expressed by the Secretary of State, reflects a hardening of attitudes. The newspaper wrote that PM Ehud Olmert has so far adopted the strict American position not to respond to the Syrian feelers. On the other hand, at the Foreign Ministry and within the defense establishment, there is a greater degree of openness to the offers, and the overall view is that the door should not be closed entirely to the Syrians. Similarly, many believe that the Syrian offers should be tested for their sincerity. Among the leading individuals supporting this view is Defense Minister Amir Peretz.

Leading media (banner in Yediot) reported that on Sunday the heads of the Israeli defense establishment will present to the cabinet the yearly security assessment for 2007. The media said that the report states that there are low chances for a war to break out this year. However, the defense bodies will allegedly warn about the strengthening of Hamas and Hizbullah, Syria's determination, and the acceleration of the Iranian nuclear program. Yediot reported that Israel will ask for one extra billion dollars from the US. The newspaper wrote that an interministerial delegation headed by Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer is expected to leave for Washington in the next few weeks in order to present Israel's request, which Yediot said is based on the risk of security deterioration in the North and the territories, and principally Iran's nuclear program. Yediot said that the sum that Israel will receive from the US will more likely be USD 500 million. Ha'aretz reported that Yoram Ben-Zeev, the Deputy Director for North America at the Foreign Ministry, has led a series of discussions on the creation of a new umbrella agreement that would combine all the memoranda of understanding between the US and Israel, give them new validity, and highlight the special nature of the relations.

The Jerusalem Post quoted senior diplomatic officials as saying on Thursday that Olmert is confident that Israel will not be blindfolded until at-least mid-summer by new proposals aimed at jump-starting the diplomatic process. The newspaper also reported that Palestinian PM Ismail Haniyeh hopes to finalize a Palestinian unity government by next week.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihasnoglou, the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, as

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saying, in an interview with the Saudi daily Arab News, that Israel's excavations at Jerusalem's Mugrabi Gate are akin to the action of the ousted Taliban government in Afghanistan.

All media reported that the GOI's anti-terror headquarters has renewed its advisory against travels of Israelis to the Sinai. Media reported that Egypt is still looking for terrorists intent on carrying out actions against Israelis in the peninsula. Israel Radio reported that, during his investigation by Egyptian authorities, a Palestinian who was caught carrying an explosive belt admitted he belonged to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The radio quoted Islamic Jihad as saying that it would not carry out operations on Egyptian soil.

Arabic-language Kull al-Arab reported that six Arab Knesset members met with King Abdullah II in Jordan about three weeks ago. They also met with the Jordanian Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and the Security Services Director. King Abdullah asked the MKs to help in calming the situation in the West Bank. General Mohammad Al-Thahabi,

Jordanian Security Services Director, said that Jordan is implementing President Bush's policy in the Middle East and that there are no problems between Jordan and the US. In addition, Al-Thahabi expressed Jordan's efforts in combating "extreme Islamic terrorism."

Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh was quoted as saying in an interview with Arabic-language Assennara, following recent news about Israel's expanded military maneuvers in the north, that Israel has no intention to attack Syria and that the exercises were only meant to restore military skills to a paratrooper division that had not practiced for several years.

Ha'aretz printed an AP story that an independent report ordered by the UN, written by John Dugard, and to be presented to the Human Rights Council next month, compares Israel's action in the territories to the apartheid regime in South Africa. AP reported that Yitzhak Levanon, Israel's Representative to the UN institutions in Geneva, has strongly criticized Dugard, saying that the report has only attacked Israel and that its conclusions is basically flawed and intentionally biased. Conversely, The Jerusalem Post reported that on Thursday, in a surprising move, the UN's anti-racism panel praised Israel for the detailed report it had provided on issues relating to racism and discrimination. The Jerusalem Post quoted Ambassador Levanon as saying that he was "optimistic" that Israel would receive a fair hearing as the UN conducts its periodic review of the state's compliance with its convention against racial discrimination.

Hatzofe and Israel Radio reported that, for the third consecutive year, trucks of the International Committee of the Red Cross will transport thousands of tons of apples grown in Druze communities on the Golan to Syria. Hatzofe reported that this week Agriculture Minister Shalom Simhon asked the Treasury to fund the request to the tune of approximately 1.4 million shekels (around USD 334,700).

Yediot reported that Olmert has asked Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz to consider easing security procedures for Israeli-Arab travelers passing through Ben-Gurion Airport and other border crossings. Olmert cited the humiliating and discriminatory treatment they are reportedly currently submitted to.

The media reported that Labor Party Chairman Amir Peretz claimed victory in Thursday's cabinet reshuffle, but The Jerusalem Post quoted sources close to Peretz as saying that Olmert's government could fall soon due to the diplomatic stalemate with the Palestinians. Peretz had been pleading for Labor to be given the Social Affairs portfolio for months until Tourism Minister Isaac Herzog agreed on Thursday to swap portfolios and become social affairs minister.

Yediot reported that the Israeli company Arpal will provide protection from car bombs, explosive devices, and shooting attacks for 1,000 housing units used by US military personnel around the world.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Having a moderating force in the Gaza Strip and within the Palestinian Authority is in Israel's interest, but it is not enough. Israel must also insist that the Palestinians pass the critical test of reining in terror and fully abide by all agreements."

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet wrote in Ha'aretz: "Never in recent decades has a US administration been in this kind of international trouble, with such an inferior package of political creativity. It's a sorry portrait of our great friend. We have known far better times together."

Palestinian affairs correspondent Khaled Abu Toameh wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Abbas, according to [a

top PA] official, claimed that Washington had actually endorsed the Israeli stance toward the Fatah-Hamas agreement."

Former editor-in-chief Moshe Ishon wrote in the editorial of the nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe: "In his first steps, the [new IDF] Chief of Staff has pointed to the right direction for tomorrow's IDF. The maneuver he initiated this week is an indication of that development."

Block Quotes:

I. "Lest the Sword Slip From Our Hand"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/23): "Of course Israel must help Mahmoud Abbas, and through him, the suffering Palestinian people. But it cannot participate in a sneaky attempt by Hamas to use a moderate and positive-thinking man like Salam Fayad, who would have been the finance minister in a unity government, to put aid money into the hands of Hamas ministers, including those heading the movement's military wing. Having a moderating force in the Gaza Strip and within the Palestinian Authority is in Israel's interest, but it is not enough. Israel must also insist that the Palestinians pass the critical test of reining in terror and fully abide by all agreements."

II. "Against Israeli Rationality"

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet wrote in Ha'aretz (2/23): "Not everything the government does is a failure. The big success this week ... belongs to Ehud Olmert. In a surprise move, he trapped the US Secretary of State on her inconsequential visit to Jerusalem. Olmert placed a bomb under the chances of extracting anything that might result in an understanding emerging out of his meeting with Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas and out of the Mecca summit. It was a speedy achievement and also one of the peaks of the Prime Minister's style of governmental arrogance.... While the British Prime Minister again proposed, on Wednesday, with English politeness, that Israel should talk to Hamas, the headline of a New York Times editorial, for example, termed the meeting in Jerusalem a 'charade.' The moderate meaning of that is a game of illusions. A more appropriate gloss would speak of deception. Condoleezza Rice came without any new ideas. She yielded to Olmert, who struck a deal behind her back in a phone call to President George W. Bush. Thus, in a rare sequence of events, we heard a senior representative of the superpower declaiming the inflexibility of the local leader. The guest also allowed Olmert to humiliate her.... The President, no little fundamentalist in his own right, trashed the recommendations. Never in recent decades has a US administration been in this kind of international trouble, with such an inferior package of political creativity. It's a sorry portrait of our great friend. We have known far better times together."

III. "A Mecca Prayer Unanswered"

Palestinian affairs correspondent Khaled Abu Toameh wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/23): "Reflecting the gloomy mood in Abbas's office [following the PA Chairman's meeting with Secretary Rice], a top PA official said he did not rule out the possibility that Abbas would eventually end up being isolated in the Mugata like his predecessor, Yasser Arafat. 'Rice employed a threatening tone during the talks with President Abbas,' the official said. 'We've never seen her in such a bad mood. She just doesn't understand that the President had no choice but to reach a deal with Hamas.' The official quoted Abbas as telling his aides after the Ramallah meeting that, by rejecting the Mecca deal, the US was 'pushing the Palestinian people toward civil war.' Abbas, according to the official, claimed that Washington had actually endorsed the Israeli stance toward the Fatah-Hamas agreement."

IV. "Facing the Syrian Arms Race"

Former editor-in-chief Moshe Ishon wrote in the editorial of the nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe (2/23): "The IDF maneuver that was conducted this week in northern Israel was directed, among other goals, at Syria's arming with Iranian support.... In the next war, it is not only with terrorists that we will have to cope. The real

foes threatening Israel are the Syrians and the Iranians who are equipping themselves with state-of-the-art weapons. They are very close to getting non-conventional weapons with all the consequences this entails. In his first steps, the [new IDF] Chief of Staff has pointed to the right direction for tomorrow's IDF. The maneuver he initiated this week is an indication of that development."

12. Iran:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The mullahs are betting that short-term financial interests will prevent Europe from defending itself and acting against an existential threat to Israel. Europe, this time, must prove the tyrants wrong."

Washington correspondent Hilary Leila Krieger wrote in The Jerusalem Post: "Some in the Jewish community who want Bush to have as much latitude as possible to take the steps he sees as necessary to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon [are worried]."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Stop Subsidizing Iran"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (2/23): "Thursday's IAEA report confirms what everyone knows: Iran has not only failed to meet the UN Security Council's two-month deadline to stop uranium enrichment, but has expanded those activities. The regime's statements and actions are an open challenge to the international community to make good on its promise to tighten sanctions against Tehran. It should not be necessary to spell out the consequences of an international failure to prevail in this confrontation with the Iranian regime. Since 9/11, the regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq have paid a price for their support for terrorism, and Libya has capitulated. But Iran and Syria sense that sowing mayhem in Iraq, Lebanon and Gaza presents them with an opportunity to turn the tables and intimidate the West into permanently living with terrorism.... European nations, particularly Germany, consider themselves to be friends with Israel. To a degree that is perhaps surprising, a recent poll indicated the feeling is mutual..... It is hard to see, however, how such warm ties would remain unaffected when Europe in general, and Germany in particular, refuses to substantially curtail its economic ties to Iran. This hesitancy may not be surprising, given that the German Chamber of Commerce claims that 10,000 jobs could be lost if tough sanctions are imposed on Tehran. But imagine the cost of Iranian nuclear blackmail, growing terrorism and a sharp jump in oil prices engineered by Tehran. The mullahs are betting that short-term financial interests will prevent Europe from defending itself and acting against an existential threat to Israel. Europe, this time, must prove the tyrants wrong."

II. "Congressional Cold Shoulder"

Washington correspondent Hilary Leila Krieger wrote in The Jerusalem Post (2/23): "'Anybody who's looking at American foreign policy and thinking the President is going to be given the flexibility he was given in 2002-3 is deluding himself,' said National Jewish Democratic Council executive director Iran Forman. Forman maintained that many Americans -- including many Jews -- are relieved by that notion, given Bush's international track record. But it worries some in the Jewish community who want Bush to have as much latitude as possible to take the steps he sees as necessary to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon -- including, if it comes to it, military action."